

Galling Fire From 3 Sides Dooms Foe to Heavy Losses, Even if He Escapes Trap

Two Avenues of Retreat
From Marne Pocket
Deluged by Shells

Steady Rear Guard
Fighting Is Costly

Enemy's Initial Plans Com-
pletely Upset by Ameri-
can Forces

By Hilaire Belloc

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TO UNDERSTAND what is going on as a sequel to the Allied victory of July 18 one must appreciate that the enemy is trying to "extricate" himself. We must understand this word extricate.

Take an arc not much more than twenty-five miles across and less than twenty miles deep. Imagine on that arc no less than at least thirty-five divisions crammed with their material, their accumulated dumps for shells, their artillery, including the heaviest pieces, their stores of food and provisions and all preparations for what was on July 15 the great offensive movement.

One must realize that each of those thirty-five divisions means at least 9,000 infantrymen and some 6,000 others, less only by the dead, wounded and prisoners; and all this huge mass crammed in so narrow a space is compelled to retire through two points where the roads of the district meet, Fere-en-Tardenois and Ville-en-Tardenois, both of which are under direct fire at a comparatively short range, while the whole arc is under converging fire from every side.

That is the situation at the present moment on the Crown Prince's left. A more expensive one could not be conceived. The mouth of the pocket is not so narrow that the troops within are doomed. Far from it. The mouth, as any one can see by looking at a map, is broader than deep. But what the defeated enemy is condemned to by his position is enormous losses in proportion to those of his victorious assailants. He has to counter attack ceaselessly in order to preserve the centres of supply and retreat behind him from being reached. And, as I have said, he is under converging fire the whole time.

Greatest Victory

Since That of Marne

The battle which has been fought since July 15, though its full effects are not yet apparent, is the most clear cut episode that we have had upon the Western front since the victory of the Marne. I will describe it as best I can.

After a pause of a month, imposed upon them by their very heavy losses, especially those on April 29, the Germans effected a very complete surprise and scored a success on May 27 which might have led to the very gravest consequences. They struck at a front of about thirty-five miles north of the line uniting the towns of Soissons and Rheims. The very strong position known as the Chemin des Dames, which was in the hands of the Allies, was broken at once. At the first onset the enemy poured through a wide gap, took many thousands of prisoners and hundreds of guns, and in an exceedingly rapid advance in less than three days reached the Marne at Chateau Thierry.

At one blow he had produced a bulge, pocket or salient, somewhat over thirty miles in length and also about thirty in depth. He had destroyed yet another sector of the old permanent front, and upon yet another new line of over eighty miles (counting the whole of the way around from Rheims to the Marne near Dormans down to Chateau Thierry and up to Soissons again) he had condemned the defence to the dangerous chance of maintaining itself in rapidly made trenches and to the hurried stemming of the tide of the German attack by putting in everything available in the neighborhood.

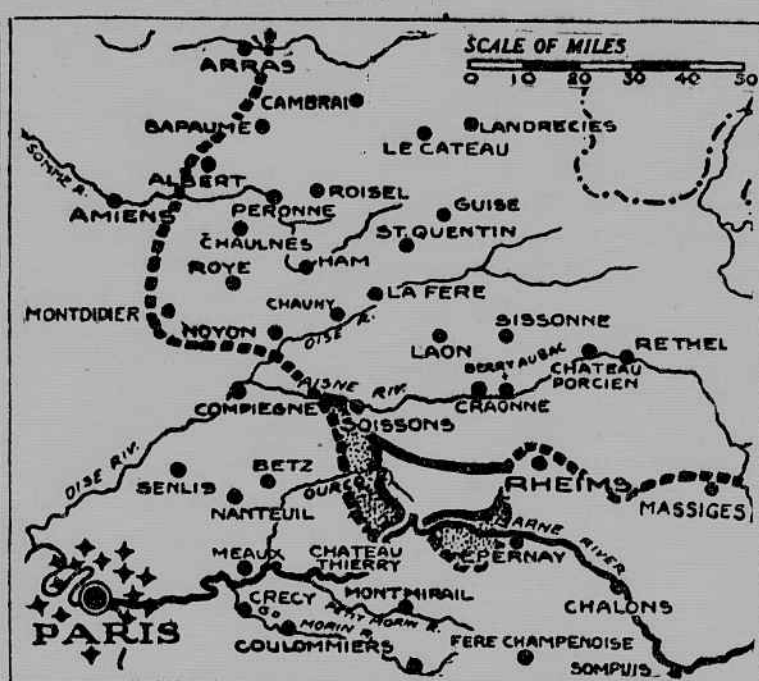
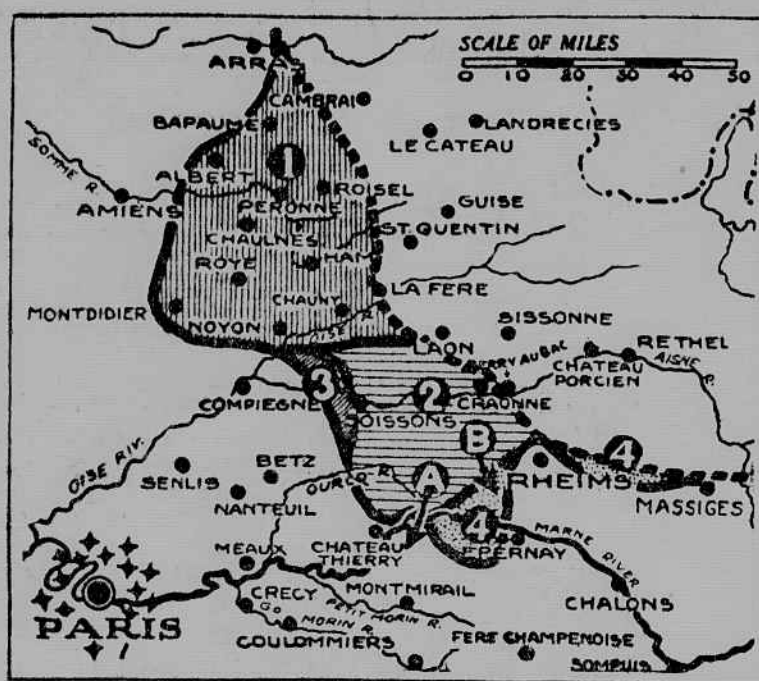
Success Put Allies
In a Corner

Furthermore, this great success was probably unexpected upon the enemy's part, at least upon any such a scale. It brought him to within forty miles of Paris, and it further had two strategic results:

First, it put the Allies into a sort of a corner, marked by the towns of Montdidier, Noyon, Soissons and Chateau Thierry. The German break-through, between Soissons and Rheims, had left the Allies on the left of Soissons and thus thrust them into an awkward angle which could be attacked upon both sides.

Second, it had created another salient upon the east, of which Rheims was the point. This salient was much shallower than the other, and its angle was much more ob-

THE END OF THE GERMAN DRIVE FOR PARIS



These two maps show how Foch's Franco-American drive between Soissons and Chateau Thierry has ended the German menace to Paris. The left hand map shows how the Germans have advanced, the broken ground won (1), in the drive starting March 21; (2), the Aisne battle; (3), the smashing of the Montdidier-Noyon-Soissons-Chateau Thierry salient; the arrows show (A), the primary purpose of the attack, to swing southwest around Chateau Thierry for Paris, which was blocked by the Americans' counter attack on Monday, July 15, and (B), the attempt to crush the Rheims salient, which was still in the balance when the counter offensive opened.

In the right hand map the broken line shows the front as it stood when Foch launched his counter offensive, and the shaded areas, the ground won from the Germans in the early stages of the battle. The heavy line the Germans can halt their retreat. It will be noticed that when they reach this line the "Paris front" will have disappeared and the two salients, east and west, will have been eliminated, making it impossible to renew the attack

of men and material to the Allies, inseparable from such defeat.

Second, a nearer approach to Paris, because the enemy's extreme right near Chateau Thierry, when once thrown across the Marne, would, if it broke in the Allied line here, probably get as far as within bombardment range of the capital before the rush could be stopped.

Third, and most important in the largest strategic view of this matter, his success would have cut the only remaining good railway system for keeping the Allied center and north in touch with the south and east. If, for instance, he had broken the line between the Main de Massiges and Rheims so thoroughly as to get to Cézanne, within forty-eight hours, and to the Seine on the third day, the whole Allied line eastward right down to Nancy would have been imperilled. The enemy had some right to anticipate such a result from the great success of his two main blows, and on the morning of July 15 he struck.

What happened may be told in sequence day by day.

First Check by American Troops

On the first day, Monday, two things happened. First, on his right, between Chateau Thierry and Dormans, the enemy crossed the Marne and got well on to the wooded heights to the south of the river. But his attempt to enlarge this success, which was upon a front of about eleven miles, and especially his attempt to enlarge it to the west, that is, toward Paris, was checked by American troops. These counter attacks on Monday afternoon and evening with great violence and threw the enemy right back upon the river. The consequence of that brilliant piece of work we shall see in a moment.

Meanwhile on the other limb of the attack—the eastern one, between Rheims and the Main de Massiges—General Gouraud put into practice a new tactic, which proved entirely successful. We all know that the defensive has become organized more and more in depth during the past year—that is, that the main line of resistance has been put further and further back from the front line. But General Gouraud had not only organized his defensive system very deeply, he had also determined that on the first shot he would yield ground and retire materially, and by trusting to a comparatively few isolated and strongly defended posts, take the heaviest possible toll of the enemy.

The enemy's attack, therefore, when it came, was something like the thrust of a fencer who overreaches himself as his enemy withdraws. But the metaphor is incomplete, because we must remember that in this case the thrust was not only a failure but was also murderously expensive. The probability is that the fearful losses the Germans suffered on that Monday, east of Rheims, were added to by some bungling on the enemy's part. They were quite exceptionally high, and all that loss was incurred without anything to show for it except a mere piece of ground of little value.

Very few prisoners were taken, and, what is really extraordinary, no guns were captured, while the enemy's fifteen divisions of shock troops in this region were fought to a standstill before night. The check was a most serious one. Its gravity was recognized at once by the enemy's High Command, which broke the general in charge of these operations and replaced him at once by

another. So ended the first day, July 15.

The second day, Tuesday, the enemy's high command, on surveying the situation, decided it might yet be recovered. The enemy probably hardly thought it possible to make good his attack east of Rheims, but he still believed it possible to make good on the western sector between Rheims and Chateau Thierry, and to crush in the salient in that way. To the north of Dormans, and in the northern part of the sector between the Marne and Rheims, is the formidable obstacle called the Mountain and Forest of Rheims—a group of high hills covered with woods. The enemy could hardly hope to force this, but he could turn

it by the south or right, and if he could get another four or five miles further beyond the Marne he would have outflanked it. We have seen how, on the day before, the Americans had stopped his attempt to extend westward, or toward Paris, the belt he had occupied south of the Marne. He was still free to extend it eastward toward Epernay, and throughout the whole of Tuesday his fight was aimed to effect this. Very little was done on that day.

On the third day, Wednesday, however, the enemy achieved something which looked like the beginning of a belated success for him. But the dawn of the fourth day, Thursday, brought a dramatic change in the whole situation, the

causes of which it is most interesting to examine. The Germans across the Marne and those fighting outward toward Epernay, where the greatest weight of men had been gathered, were facing southeastward and standing on the eastern side of the great pocket or bulge which runs from Soissons around by the Marne to Rheims, and which they had won by the end of May.

Directly behind them, on the western side of this pocket, Foch struck with French and American troops combined, and he effected a complete surprise. He broke through the enemy's first lines without preliminary bombardment and went right on through his defensive system to the very gates of Soissons, on the north, and up both sides of the Ourcq Valley, in the centre. French troops, in the main, performed the first part of this operation and American troops the second.

He pushed forward along the Epernay road until he got not around but abreast of the forest of Rheims.

Offensive Completely

Broken Down

The counter stroke was not intended to do more than it did. The Allies have not yet a superiority in numbers. They could neither prepare for nor expect a full breach in the enemy lines. They are still upon the defensive, but the results reaped by the blow struck just where it was are conclusive. That blow put an end to the enemy offensive and turned it into a strategical breakdown as complete as that suffered just before by the Austrians on the Piave.

The most advanced enemy units have been thrown back across the Marne and are still retreating. The whole elaborate scheme, planned for five weeks and launched with some two-thirds of the enemy's available free force, has gone to pieces. It is a curious detail in the combined operation that whereas the number of prisoners taken in the stroke and counter stroke are about equal on the two sides, the Allies counted over 500 guns, and the Germans not a single piece.

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Reduced to 1.85

2.00 Madras Shirts
Reduced to 1.45

1.00 Fancy Silk Scarves
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1.50 and 2.00 Silk Scarves
Reduced to .85

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